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Title : Rest Behavior In Killer Whales Calves and Their Mothers

Category : Behavior

Student : Not Applicable

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Abstract : Newborns of all studied terrestrial mammals and seals show the highest amounts of rest and sleep of their lives. In subsequent months the total duration of sleep progressively decreases until it reaches the adult levels. In this study we video recorded the behavior of two killer whale calves and their mothers at Sea World in San Diego from their birth until 12 and 5 months old (calf 1 and 2, respectively). Observations were conducted at intervals of 1-2 weeks (first 2 months) and 3 months (3-12 months). In captivity, rest behavior in adult killer whales is characterized by floating motionless at the surface or lying at the bottom and occasionally by slow circular swimming. After parturition the females we studied abruptly ceased their typical rest behavior and swam continuously during the 3-week postpartum period. Both calves continuously followed their mothers at this time. Slow circular swimming was the only behavior that might represent rest in the calves and their mothers during this period (<18% of 24-h). Both mothers resumed resting at the surface starting when the calves were about 3 weeks old. The calves began to stop at the surface for rest after they reached 1 month of age. During the second month of their lives, the calves progressively increased the duration of rest at the surface (14-33% and 2%-8% of the nighttime in calves 1 and 2, respectively), however the total amount of this behavior in calves was significantly smaller than in their mothers (45-54% and 5-19%). In conclusion, the developmental profile of rest in killer whale calves and the postpartum rest behavior of their mothers differs dramatically from that of all previously studied terrestrial mammals. Unlike all terrestrial mammals, newborn killer whales and their mothers are highly active after the calf's birth.